



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **LAW FIRM EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO MONEY LAUNDERING IN INTERNATIONAL VISA FRAUD SCAM**

*Four local law firm employees were indicted for smuggling Chinese nationals into United States*

HOUSTON — A local law firm employee pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court this morning to conspiring with an immigration attorney and others to launder \$267,000 in funds earned through an international visa scam, following an investigation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Horacio Golfarini, 43, a U.S. permanent resident and native of Uruguay, pleaded guilty today following his indictment in March. He admitted paying local businesses between \$10,000 to \$20,000 to control an interest in the Houston-based companies he and others duped. Golfarini enticed Chinese nationals to enter the U.S. as intra-company transferees, managers or executives. Golfarini was president of Capital Services Group and also an employee of Kenneth Rothery of Rothery Law Offices in Houston.

Norman Chapa, 52, a U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty in June 2004 to charges of visa fraud and to filing frivolous immigration petitions. Chapa admitted taking part in an international visa scam from May 1999 to January 2004. Chapa described how he helped recruit Chinese nationals while he was employed by Kenneth Rothery. The Chinese nationals sought immigration benefits that would allow them to enter and work in the United States.

Kenneth Rothery, 64, a local immigration attorney and owner of Rothery Law Firm in Houston, was indicted in March on charges of visa fraud, money laundering and encouraging Chinese nationals to enter the U.S. illegally.

If convicted, Rothery faces up to five years imprisonment for each of the nine counts on charges of encouraging unlawful immigration, 12 counts of visa fraud, and various money laundering charges relating to the financial transactions conducted with the proceeds of \$267,000 of money paid to him by the Chinese nationals.

"We will investigate and promote prosecuting anyone who files false petitions to circumvent the federal immigration procedures in place," said Bob Rutt, ICE's special agent-in-charge. "We will work closely with the U.S. Attorney's office to ensure that individuals don't abuse our legal and immigration systems and legitimate employers."

The indictment alleges that Rothery, Golfarini and Chapa filed frivolous immigration petitions by creating the illusion that there was an affiliation between specific Chinese and U.S. companies. The three were charged with sending fictitious immigration petitions to the Texas Service Center (TSC), which is part of the Office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The defendants purportedly employed these Chinese nationals at one of eight local businesses as intra-company transferees or executives. They completed fictitious immigration forms and acted as petitioners on behalf of the Chinese nationals. After entering the United States, those seeking to gain employment also thought they could ultimately adjust their status to remain in the U.S.

Each Chinese national was willing to pay as much as \$100,000 for immigrant visas and work authorization documents.

A fourth defendant, Ricardo Aguirre, 53, from Houston, was also charged with immigration fraud last August. Aguirre worked with Rothery and admitted he paid U.S. business owners about \$20,000 each for creating fraudulent subsidiary relationships with Chinese companies to sponsor the employment-based petitions for his Chinese clients.

Horacio Golfarini is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 4. He faces up to 20 years in prison and fines up to \$500,000.

Norman Chapa pleaded guilty last June and is scheduled to be sentenced Nov. 18. He faces up to five years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000.

Ricardo Aguirre pleaded guilty and awaits sentencing. He faces up to 10 years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000.

Kenneth Rothery remains a fugitive and efforts are underway to secure his return to the United States.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Criminal Investigation's unit also assisted in this ICE-led investigation.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*